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RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 0526  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 2985  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 4043  
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 1461  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 001448

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [JA](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: JAPAN FM ASO'S MEETING WITH ROK FM SONG  
"FORWARD-LOOKING"

REF: SEOUL 00971

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. FM Aso's March 31 meeting with ROK FM Song was "very good" and "forward-looking, according to MOFA Northeast Asia Division Director Yamada. Aso and Song agreed that China's economic rise offered opportunities, but differed slightly on their evaluation of PRC military transparency, with Aso stressing that China had not done enough. On North Korea, Tokyo and Seoul expressed hope for a quick resolution of the BDA issue and early resumption of Six-Party Talks. Song raised history issues, but in a "formulaic" manner, according to Yamada. The two FMs announced resumption of DG-level talks on security between their respective North American affairs bureaus. Yamada described as premature media reports that the ROK, PRC, and Japan planned to hold trilateral ministerial discussions in early June. End Summary.

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Unfortunate Timing  
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¶2. (C) On April 2, MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Northeast Asia Division Director Shigeo Yamada briefed Embassy political officers on FM Aso's March 31 meeting in Cheju with ROK FM Song Min-soon in South Korea. Yamada characterized the meeting as "very good" and "forward-looking." Aso and Song met for two-hours, then continued their discussion during a two and one-half hour dinner. Yamada termed the timing of the visit as "unfortunate" due to coincidental ROK media attention to three historical issues: PM Abe's recent statements on comfort women, the March 22 release by the Diet Library of papers documenting Japanese government involvement in the enshrinement of war criminals in Yasukuni Shrine and the March 30 release of a report on textbook revision that maintained Japan's position on the disputed Liancourt Rocks.

¶3. (C) Because of South Korea's sensitivity to historical issues, Song had to raise all three, but it did so in a formulaic manner to which Aso responded briefly, Yamada said. On comfort women, Aso reviewed PM Abe's March 26 Diet presentation during which he reaffirmed his commitment to the

1993 Kono Statement. With regard to textbooks, Japan argued that the two sides should agree to disagree. Finally, Aso advised Song that, while Japan's former Ministry of Health and Labor had provided requested information about war criminals to Yasukuni Shrine officials, the officials had made the final decision about whom to enshrine. According to Yamada, Aso emphasized that "there was no government role in the enshrinement decision-making process."

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China  
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¶4. (C) The two foreign ministers expressed concern about the PRC's recent ASAT test, and reviewed the "good aspects" of China's economic rise - a development that provided opportunity for both Japan and South Korea. Tokyo and Seoul, Yamada maintained, offered slightly differing views on the PRC's military spending, with Song suggesting that transparency was improving, while Aso argued that China's military transparency was far from adequate.

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North Korea  
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¶5. (C) According to Yamada, Aso and Song shared their respective understandings on the Six-Party Talks process, and reviewed possible future steps. The two men expressed hope that the BDA issue would be resolved in the near future. Yamada identified several areas where Japan and the ROK appeared to have similar views: 1) BDA issues prevented

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further discussion on denuclearization, 2) the Six-Party discussions should resume as soon as possible, 3) on the utility of holding a Six-Party ministerial meeting following completion of the 60-day timeline, and 4) the South Korea decision to provide HFO to North Korea as part of the initial actions agreed to in the Six-Party agreement. Aso stressed that Japan expected the DPRK to fully disclose all extracted plutonium and its HEU program. Song made no response to this statement, Yamada said.

¶6. (C) Aso provided a readout on Japan's Six-Party Working Group meeting with North Korea in Hanoi. Tokyo told Pyongyang that Japan was ready to settle the abduction issue as well as issues related to "the unfortunate past." Aso also noted Tokyo's decision not to provide energy assistance until progress is made on the abduction issue. Song expressed understanding and support for Japan's efforts to resolve the abduction issue and to improve Japan-DPRK relations, Yamada related. Song also told Aso that the ROK had raised the abduction issue with North Korea "many times."

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Bilateral Issues  
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¶7. (C) Yamada described as premature media reports that the ROK, PRC, and Japan would hold trilateral ministerial discussions on June 3, prior to the June 4-5 Asian Cooperation Dialogue. In fact, Aso had responded to Seoul's proposal by noting that Diet obligations would limit his travel, reducing the chances that he would be available for the meeting at the proposed time. Yamada continued that while FM Aso may be unable to attend the June 3 meeting, the trilateral would probably go forward at a lower level. Aso and Song also agreed to resume their bilateral security dialogue at the Director General-level. The talks had been suspended for the last four years, he noted. Asian Affairs DG Sasae will lead the Japanese side at the next round. In addition, the two FM's agreed to resume consultations between their North American Affairs Directors General. Those talks, too, had been on hiatus.

18. (C) Separately, Japan and the ROK agreed to double the number of university students involved in an exchange program to 1,000. Aso and Song also announced the launch of a second Japan-South Korea historical research program, that will be headed up on the Japanese side by Tokyo University Professor Emeritus Toriumi, who is the author of a book comparing Chinese, Korean and Japanese textbooks.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Yamada acknowledged that one of the main accomplishments of the meeting was simply the length of time that the two foreign ministers spent together. After the chilly Koizumi years, it will take time for the relationship to warm. Ongoing differences over history will continue to impede progress. Nonetheless, resumption of DG-level dialogues and the ROK's interest in a trilateral ministerial indicate a desire for better relations.  
SCHIEFFER